



Questions & Answers on the NOAA Fisheries Service Endangered Species Act Listing Proposal for Puget Sound Steelhead

(March 29, 2006)

Q. What did NOAA Fisheries Service announce today about Puget Sound steelhead?

A. Today we announced the results of a scientific review of the status of steelhead populations and protective measures in Puget Sound. Based on our review we're proposing that Puget Sound steelhead be listed as a threatened species under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). We initiated this review in response to a petition submitted to the agency by Sam Wright in September 2004.

Q. What happens now that Puget Sound steelhead has been proposed for ESA listing?

A. To ensure that the final action resulting from this proposed rule will be as accurate and effective as possible, and informed by the best available scientific and commercial information, we're soliciting information, comments, and suggestions from the public, other governmental agencies, the scientific community, industry, and any other interested parties. The public comment period will remain open for 90 days, until June 27, 2006. The ESA stipulates that within one year of the proposed rule (by Mar. 29, 2007) we shall: finalize the proposed listing; withdraw the proposed listing; or extend the one-year deadline for as much as six months for the purposes of soliciting additional data to resolve substantial disagreement on the sufficiency or accuracy of the available data.

Q. How can I provide comment or additional information on the proposed listing of Puget Sound steelhead?

A. You may submit comments and information by any of the following methods. Please identify submittals as pertaining to the "Puget Sound Steelhead Proposed Listing."

- E-mail: PS.Steelhead.nwr@noaa.gov. Please include "Puget Sound Steelhead Proposed Listing" in the subject line of the message.
- Internet: Submit comments electronically through the Federal e-Rulemaking portal at <http://www.regulations.gov>.
- Mail: Submit written comments and information to Chief, NMFS, Protected Resources Division, 1201 NE Lloyd Blvd., Suite 1100, Portland, OR 97232. You may also hand-deliver written comments during normal business hours to this street address.
- Fax: 503-230-5441.

Q. Will NOAA Fisheries Service hold a public meeting?

A. Yes. We anticipate holding a public meeting in the Seattle area in late June 2006. The exact location, date, and time of the meeting will be announced on our regional Website (<http://www.nwr.noaa.gov>), as well as in a forthcoming notice to be published in the *Federal Register*. This meeting will provide the general public with an opportunity to meet with NOAA Fisheries Service staff in small groups to discuss

the proposed listing and related information. The meeting will also provide another opportunity for the public to provide formal comments on the proposal.

Q. Has NOAA Fisheries Service proposed critical habitat and protective regulations for Puget Sound steelhead?

A. No. In this proposed rule we have announced that we will propose protective regulations and critical habitat in subsequent *Federal Register* notices. We're soliciting information from the public about the protective regulations that are necessary and advisable for conservation of Puget Sound steelhead, and biological and economic information relevant to making a critical habitat designation for these fish.

Q. Didn't NOAA Fisheries Service already review Puget Sound steelhead?

A. Yes. In 1996, we conducted a comprehensive status review of coastal and inland steelhead stocks in California, Oregon, Washington and Idaho. As part of this review we identified a Puget Sound "evolutionarily significant unit" (ESU) of coastal steelhead.

Q. What was the result of that earlier ESA review?

A. The biological review team (BRT) concluded that the Puget Sound steelhead ESU was not in danger of extinction or likely to become endangered in the foreseeable future. Informed by the BRT's findings, we concluded that the Puget Sound steelhead ESU did not warrant listing under the ESA, but expressed concern about the sustainability of summer steelhead populations, and potentially adverse impacts from hatchery practices in Puget Sound.

Q. What has changed from the earlier ESA review that contributed to today's proposed threatened listing?

A. In our 1996 review we concluded that Puget Sound steelhead did not warrant ESA listing based largely on the positive overall trends for the two largest area steelhead populations, and the lack of strong trends (upward or downward) for the other winter-run steelhead populations in Puget Sound. We expressed concern at that time over the summer-run populations, and the potentially adverse impacts from steelhead hatchery practices in Puget Sound.

In our current review we are proposing that Puget Sound steelhead warrant listing as threatened, based on widespread declines in abundance and productivity over the last nine years, particularly for the two populations identified as strongholds in the 1996 review. These declines have occurred despite dramatic reductions in the harvest of natural steelhead implemented since the 1996 review. Our recent review also underscores concerns from the 1996 review about apparent declines in the summer-run life-history form, and the likely adverse effects from the widespread hatchery production of steelhead in Puget Sound.

Q. Where can I get more information on this proposal and the underlying science?

A. The *Federal Register* notice announcing the proposal, the scientific report reviewing the status of Puget Sound steelhead, and other materials are available on the Internet at: <http://www.nwr.noaa.gov>.

Questions about West Coast Steelhead

Q: *Oncorhynchus mykiss*, rainbow trout and steelhead – what is the difference?

A: Steelhead is the name commonly applied to the anadromous (sea-going) form of the biological species *Oncorhynchus mykiss* (or *O. mykiss*). *O. mykiss* exhibit one of the most complex suite of life history traits of any species of Pacific salmonid. They can be anadromous (called steelhead) or freshwater resident fish (often called rainbow or redband trout). Under some circumstances anadromous

and resident fish yield offspring of the opposite form. Those that are anadromous can spend as long as seven years in fresh water before going to sea, and then spend as much as three years in salt water before returning to spawn in their natal stream or river. While most salmonids spawn just once and die, *O. mykiss* can spawn in subsequent years.

Q: What is the jurisdictional issue I keep hearing about on *O. mykiss*?

A: The anadromous (sea-going) life form of *O. mykiss* is under our jurisdiction, while the resident form is under jurisdiction of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Today's listing action includes only the anadromous form of *O. mykiss*.

Q: The steelhead population NOAA Fisheries Service is listing is described as a distinct population segment, not an evolutionarily significant unit as in the 1996 agency review. Why is that?

A: In our previous West Coast steelhead listing determinations, we applied our evolutionarily significant unit (ESU) policy in delineating species for listing consideration. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service disagreed with this approach. It requested that we make our listing determinations for steelhead consistent with both agencies' joint distinct population segment (DPS) policy, as has been done with other species for which the agencies share jurisdiction. Given the agencies' shared jurisdiction over the species (which include both sea-going "steelhead" and resident freshwater "rainbow trout" forms), we concur with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Consistent with our recent final listing determinations for 10 West Coast steelhead distinct population segments (published on Jan. 5, 2006), today's proposed action defines steelhead populations in terms of DPSs and includes only the sea-going form of the species.

More information about the status review and listing proposal is available at <http://www.nwr.noaa.gov>.